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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 003315

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SUBJECT: XINJIANG'S URUMQI STILL TENSE, BUT LESS SO

REF: A. BEIJING 3127
[1](#)B. BEIJING 2946
[1](#)C. BEIJING 2942
[1](#)D. BEIJING 2183 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)E. BEIJING 303

Classified By: Political Minster Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4
(b/d).

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E.O. 12598: DECL: 12/11/34
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SUBJECT: Xinjiang's Urumqi Still Tense, but Less So

Ref: Beijing 3127
Beijing 2946
Beijing 2942
Beijing 2183 and previous
Beijing 303

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[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The visit of PolOff to Xinjiang in early December revealed that the security posture in the capital city of Urumqi has relaxed somewhat but armed personnel from the People's Armed Police (PAP) continue to patrol the Uighur sector and other sensitive areas. While some residents expressed strong feelings regarding the ethnic riots in July, most residents with whom PolOff spoke claimed that the climate of anger and fear was dissipating and life in the city was returning to normal. A Uighur scholar with access to leadership circles said that the Party was reviewing its ethnic policy and that the two current policy priorities were meeting the immediate quality of life needs of residents and expanding job opportunities for minorities. A Han scholar said that a major conference on ethnic policy would soon be held but he did not expect major adjustments. End Summary.

Security Presence in Uighur Area Remains Heavy

[1](#)2. (C) Although the security posture in Urumqi was relaxed compared with what we saw in previous EmbOff visits (Refs B and C), round-the-clock armed patrols by PAP troops and police units continued in the Uighur section of the city

during PolOff's November 30-December 3 visit. Columns of PAP troops armed with long clubs and machine guns patrolled on foot every 2-3 blocks, but there appeared to be no stationary troops in front of key government or Party locations, bazaars, or mosques. PAP troop-carriers and police vans roamed the streets in Uighur areas, with some carrying helmeted, armed troops. Security patrols in and near Xinjiang University were especially heavy, with armed PAP troops patrolling the area around the entrance and a steady stream of PAP and other security vehicles, some with troops, entering and leaving the campus.

13. (C) Security was relatively light near People's Square facing the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XUAR) CCP Committee headquarters, a previous site of heavy security. However, PolOff observed PAP troop carriers periodically patrolling the streets around the square, and on at least one occasion saw a column of black-clad special security forces, all carrying machine guns, entering the square. Nonetheless, the square was filled with both Han and Uighur citizens transiting the Square or engaging in leisure activities. In the Han-dominated northern part of the city, PolOff observed an occasional PAP van or troop truck but no foot patrols.

14. (C) Local residents appeared to take the heavy security presence in stride, paying little attention to the armed patrols. In the Uighur area, PolOff observed groups of 20-30 young Uighur men gathered on street corners late in the evening and saw good-sized knives for sale in the carts of street vendors. Crowds appeared somewhat sparse in outdoor market areas and eateries, such as the popular Uighur market Erdaqiao where much of the violence occurred, but the

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weather was very cold. A variety of contacts with whom PolOff talked during the week stated that on the surface, at least, life in the city had returned to normal. All contacts with whom PolOff spoke said the rumor was that Internet and SMS connectivity would be restored after Spring Festival in February. One contact said that Internet bar proprietors were being subsidized by the government and businesses had all established offices outside the XUAR in order to use the Internet and communicate with the home office by phone.

Hate and Fear Subsiding, Not Gone Yet

15. (C) With few exceptions, local residents of various stripes claimed that passions had subsided, the atmosphere of fear was dissipating, and people in general were trying to make the best of a difficult situation. An American businessman of Uighur descent told PolOff that as the only Uighur in a major Han commercial real estate company (protect), he kept a low profile and did not ask questions. However, it was his impression that people wanted to "move on" and no longer wanted to talk about the problem. However, he said, the scars remained. Another AmCit, who runs a private multi-ethnic kindergarten (protect) in a Han neighborhood, said that people in his residence compound had stayed inside for weeks but were now out and about. During the week of violence, many had spontaneously acted out of self-defense, running out to the street with axes and boards to defend themselves. Ahmadjan hasan (protect), a Uighur professor at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences, said Urumqi was much better now than even a month ago, with people on the streets going to work and school and a semblance of normal order emerging. There had been countless acts of courage and compassion on both sides during the "night of sheer terror," he said, with both Uighur and Han families opening their doors as a place of refuge to strangers of both ethnic groups. Despite the bitterness that remained, people would not forget these acts of kindness that crossed ethnic lines. He asserted that there was a strong desire among most people to create civil relations among ethnic groups, despite remaining "extremists" on both sides, and even "separatists," who wanted to stir emotions.

16. (C) A Han professional whom PolOff encountered walking with his young son at night in a Uighur area told PolOff that he thought the city was safe and that he was not afraid. After reciting the Party line that China was a multi-ethnic nation striving for greater "harmony," he confided that "many Uighurs are still very poor, which is a problem." A Xinjiang University ethnic Han student told PolOff that "a minority" of students at the university had participated in the violence, which had exacerbated ethnic tensions on campus, but the majority of students "in general, get along" and had recently returned to the classroom. He said the climate of fear, suspicion, and anger was settling down but there was still a long way to go. Providing an unintended glimpse into the prejudice that helps fuel Xinjiang's ethnic tension, the student added as an aside that although he had Uighur friends, "the quality of Uighur students is low, they complain about Han students getting all the jobs but are unwilling to look for employment, and they will steal your cell phone."

17. (C) While assertions of normalcy and calm were common among interlocutors, hints of the deep-seated emotions and concerns that lie beneath the surface occasionally came to light. In the most dramatic example, a Han cab driver, when asked why there was such a heavy security presence in the Uighur areas, became very animated and exclaimed that "they would have killed us all! The troops are there to protect Han from a slaughter!" A group of Uighur fruit vendors, who at first readily engaged PolOff in conversation, suddenly became silent and appeared very nervous when asked about the prominent security presence. One of them, nervously looking around, eventually whispered to PolOff "July 5, July 5" as his colleagues nodded in agreement. Uighur defense lawyer Dawuti Aihati, who is defending Uighurs accused of fomenting the July violence (Ref B), agreed to meet with PolOff but was very guarded. He said that he was under strict orders not to reveal any details regarding the trials or any of the background to the violence or underlying ethnic tensions, and that he was "afraid for my family" if he did so. He expressed appreciation for Embassy concern and told PolOff that "we support what the United States is doing."

18. (C) Finally, the Uighur driver who drove PolOff to meetings in the city of Shihezi simply expressed deep sadness, stating that "after all, we grew up together." The American citizen of Uighur descent, who grew up in Urumqi and whose family lives there, echoed this sentiment, saying sadly

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that "the city has changed forever." Reflecting on his personal experience during the crisis, Uighur professor Ahmadjan hasan said that once he had safely gathered his family together in their housing compound on July 5, "I sat in a chair and wept."

Party Policy Response, Adjustment

19. (C) Professor Ahmadjan hasan told PolOff that in his view, the Xinjiang and Urumqi leadership's policy response to the events of July 5 was rapid and effective, despite their inability to control the violence in the beginning. He said that that there were many "meetings, investigations, and inquiries" in both Xinjiang and Beijing in the immediate aftermath of the crisis and that some "immediate plans and actions" were put in place. The meetings were very thorough and aimed at getting to the root causes of the problem. He had been in attendance at some of the Urumqi meetings, with central leaders in attendance, and said that participants were very candid in their assessments and that leaders had listened carefully to the diverse voices and suggestions. The two core themes that emerged were "people's livelihood" (minsheng) and employment. People's livelihood was the priority, with teams being promptly dispatched to various areas of Urumqi to inquire about residents' food, water,

heating, and other daily needs and to provide assistance when necessary. The next step, he said, was to work on expanding jobs for ethnic minorities. Ahmadjan hasan himself had been sent by defense lawyers to conduct background investigations and take the pulse of Uighur sentiment in Uighur areas such as Kashgar, Hetian and Yining. He said people were angry and were demanding answers as to "how could such events have happened" and "why didn't authorities stop the violence?"

¶10. (C) Ahmadjan hasan said that the morning of the day PolOff arrived, Academy officials had unexpectedly called a meeting of the faculty to announce that a team from the Xinjiang CCP Committee, to which the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences belongs, would soon arrive to evaluate the research work and publishing done in 2009 and discuss the 2010 research agenda. Predictably, the themes for next year's work reflected the ethnic relations and policy questions raised by the July riots. Ahmadjan hasan did not blame local officials for reacting slowly or not anticipating the problem. He said that he thought most people, including himself, had been completely taken by surprise at the outburst of violence and ethnic hatred. Moreover, the violence had spread so quickly that security forces could not possibly keep up with it. He maintained that violence had erupted in rapid succession in "more than 50 locations" other than the core areas of Urumqi.

¶11. (C) Ahmadjan hasan would not comment directly on popular sentiment toward central, Xinjiang, or local leaders but said the immediate visit to Urumqi of Public Security Minister Meng Jianzhu and Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang when the violence broke out had been very important. He said that Party General Secretary Hu Jintao's early return from Italy where he had gone to attend a G8-plus-5 meeting had been especially important, and that XUAR Chairman Nuer Bekri had "taken action" and was the driver behind the early policy initiatives. (Note: Ahmad did not mention XUAR Party Secretary and Politburo Member Wang Lequan, whose resignation was demanded by Han residents, or Urumqi Party Secretary Li Zhi, who was sacked in September following protests by the city's Han residents. See Ref A.)

¶12. (C) Pro-reform Beijing University law professor He Weifang (protect), in a discussion with PolOff in the (largely Han) Xinjiang city of Shihezi, said he thought Nuer Bekri, unlike Wang Lequan, was considered a "moderate," had retained the support of the local populace, and had not been a target of public criticism. He told PolOff there was a major review of ethnic policy underway and that a conference would be convened in early 2010 with "hundreds" of participants of "diverse specialties" to explore ideas. In He's view, there would be "some adjustment" of ethnic policy but "no major changes." He offered his opinion that the July riots would never have occurred had the violence against Uighur workers in Guangdong province, the triggering event of the riots, been handled in a "fair, transparent and proper" manner through an effective judicial process. "There will be no ethnic harmony without rule of law," he concluded. (Note: PolOff met with He at Xinjiang's Shihezi University where he is in his second year of a two-year temporary assignment. He was "banished" to Xinjiang for signing the "Charter 08" democracy manifesto in December 2008. See ref E.)

GOLDBERG
HUNTSMAN